

Bluetongue: Current situation in Europe and risk to Ireland

20th June 2017

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1. Key points

- Bluetongue virus (BTV) is prevalent in Europe and a threat to Irish ruminants
- BTV serotype 8 (BTV-8) has reached a region on the north coast of France and has caused 2094 outbreaks in France since it re-emerged in 2015 (657 this year alone)
- The Bluetongue (BT) vector season in Ireland is likely to be between late April and early December
- BT may be introduced to Ireland via imported animals harbouring BT virus, infected vectors (e.g. midges) or animal products (e.g. semen)
- In the case of BTV-8, infected animals may not show any clinical signs and will only be detected through testing their blood for BTV
- Even animals with BT vaccination records may possibly harbour BTV
- If BT is introduced to Ireland, it could have a major impact on our export markets. The control measures required by the EU for BT would have a significant impact on animal movements and herd management.

2. Emergence of Bluetongue in Europe

Bluetongue is a viral disease of ruminants (eg cattle, sheep goats, deer) and is primarily transmitted by midges (*Culicoides* species). The bluetongue situation in the EU has changed in recent times with incursions of new serotypes.

Bluetongue virus is known to be present in Southern Europe, Serotypes 1, 2, 4 and 16 have all been identified in the Mediterranean basin, but only BTV serotypes 1, 8 and 25, and three vaccine strains (6, 11 and 14) have previously been identified in Northern Europe. During the 2007 epidemic of BTV-8 in Europe, the virus reached the UK mainland, but not Ireland. Map 1 in the Annex shows current bluetongue restricted areas in Europe and the serotypes involved. Map 2 shows the locations of BT outbreaks in Europe reported to the EU since the beginning of 2017.

Please see the video link below that shows how BT has spread in Europe between 2006 and 2016:

https://ec.europa.eu/food/sites/food/files/animals/docs/ad_control-measures_bt_outbreaks_video_en.mp4

3. Current situation with Bluetongue in France

France reported the re-emergence of BTV8 in sheep and cattle at a holding in Central France on 11th of September 2015. This was the first reported outbreak of BTV8 in France since 2010. Since then and as of the 16th of June 2017, France has reported a total of **2094 outbreaks** of BTV, **657 of them occurring since January 2017**. Restriction zones implemented as a result of outbreaks are indicated on Map 3 in the Annex and further details on the zones can be found at the following links:

http://ec.europa.eu/food/animals/docs/ad_control-measures_bt_restrictedzones_en.pdf

<http://agriculture.gouv.fr/liste-des-departements-et-des-communes-en-zone-reglementee-fco>

Note that only two départements (Finistère and part of Cote D'Armor) now remain free of BTV8 in France.

4. Managing the risk of Bluetongue introduction to Ireland

Bluetongue can cause a variety of clinical signs, from no signs at all, to severe signs. For information about clinical signs and other aspects of BT, please see the DAFM information leaflet:

<https://www.agriculture.gov.ie/media/migration/animalhealthwelfare/diseasecontrols/bluetongue/disease/BluetongueFactsheet4961.pdf>

4.1 What farmers and other stakeholders can do

Farmers, practitioners and other relevant stakeholders should be vigilant and ensure that they are fully aware of the presenting clinical signs of Bluetongue in both cattle and sheep, and that they report any suspicion of disease to their Regional Veterinary Office (RVO) without delay. Contact details for RVOs can be found at:

<http://www.agriculture.gov.ie/contact/>

Particular care should be taken when importing ruminants from BT affected countries as this is the most likely route of introduction of the BT virus into Ireland. Although specific EU certification requirements apply to the movement of animals originating from BT restricted zones there is evidence that these requirements are not always properly implemented. In addition, infection with certain BT serotypes (such as BTV8) may not always produce clinical signs and therefore the risk of infected animals remaining undetected pre and post importation is heightened.

For these reasons following risk mitigation measures should be seriously considered by farmers when importing ruminant animals:

- Do not import ruminant animals from BT restricted areas unless absolutely necessary
- Only import animals from reputable sources
- Do not buy or accept animals which have been recently imported without carefully checking their origin
- Seek additional assurances to ensure that animals are not infected with BT prior to departure, such as a recent negative PCR* test for BT carried out in an accredited laboratory
- Post importation, keep any imported animals isolated and indoors until they have been tested for BT by staff from this Department and have returned a negative test result (see below).

4.2 DAFM control measures

DAFM implements various measures to prevent a BT incursion and to ensure early detection in the event of disease being introduced into Ireland including:

- All animals imported from or transiting through countries restricted for BT are blood tested for BT virus and antibody, within 7 days of arrival in Ireland
- Ongoing surveillance for BT in the Irish cattle population
- Close monitoring the situation in France and other EU countries
- Close liaison with the UK in order to assess the risk of a disease incursion
- Implementation of an ongoing awareness campaign for stakeholder groups
- Working with Met Éireann on an early warning system for *Culicoides* midge incursions from the UK or France.

5. Implications for intra-community movements of cattle, sheep and goats

Specific EU certification requirements apply to the movement of animals originating from BT restricted zones including animals for export. These requirements are set out in the EU Regulation 1266 of 2007 and would apply in the event of a BT outbreak in Ireland.

There are also additional requirements for animals that are transiting or destined for BT restricted zones. In this case **the means of transport must be treated** with an authorised insecticide and/or repellent at the place of loading. The transport must be adequately cleansed and disinfected prior to this treatment. However animals do not need to be individually treated.

In addition when a rest period of **more than one day is foreseen at a control post** during the movement through a restricted zone, the animals must be protected against attacks by vectors in a vector protected establishment. This vector protected establishment must comply with certain criteria including mesh screens over openings etc. These vector protected establishments must also be approved by the competent authority.

6. Vaccination for Bluetongue

Vaccines against a number of BTV serotypes exist. However the option to vaccinate for BT is not available to farmers in Ireland at the moment. This situation is kept under constant review.

In Great Britain BTV-8 vaccine has been available since mid-July 2016 and the authorities there have encouraged farmers to consider vaccination against BTV. However the final decision to vaccinate is left to the farmer, in consultation with their private veterinary practitioner.

Bluetongue vaccination is not permitted in Northern Ireland at the moment.

7. Further information on bluetongue

Further information may be found on the DAFM website at the following link:

<http://www.agriculture.gov.ie/bluetongue/>

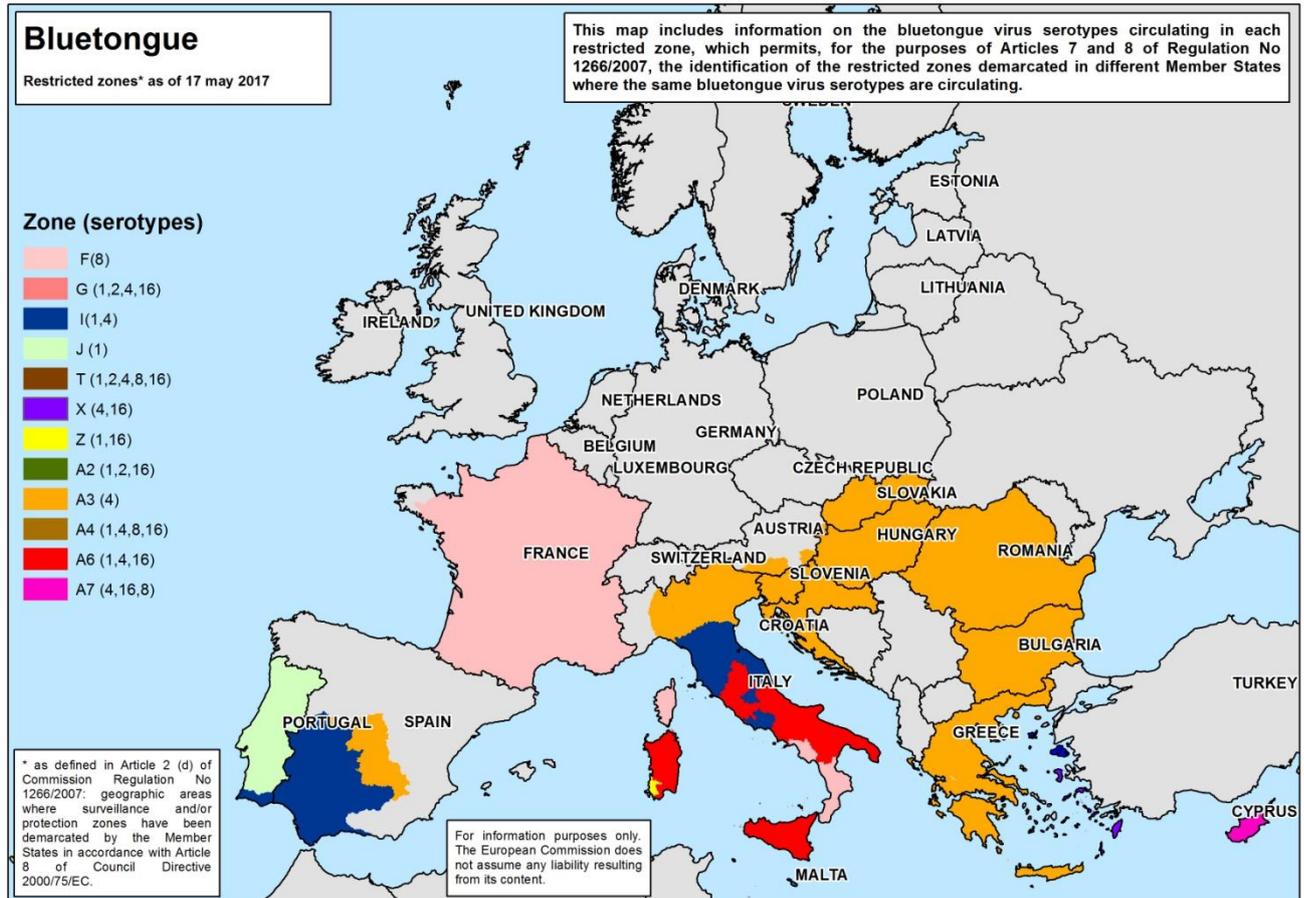
National Disease Control Centre

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***PCR** or **polymerase chain reaction** is a technique used in molecular biology to detect virus genome in this case. A test for BT is usually carried out on blood. A positive PCR test essentially means that the virus is present in the sample tested.

Annex

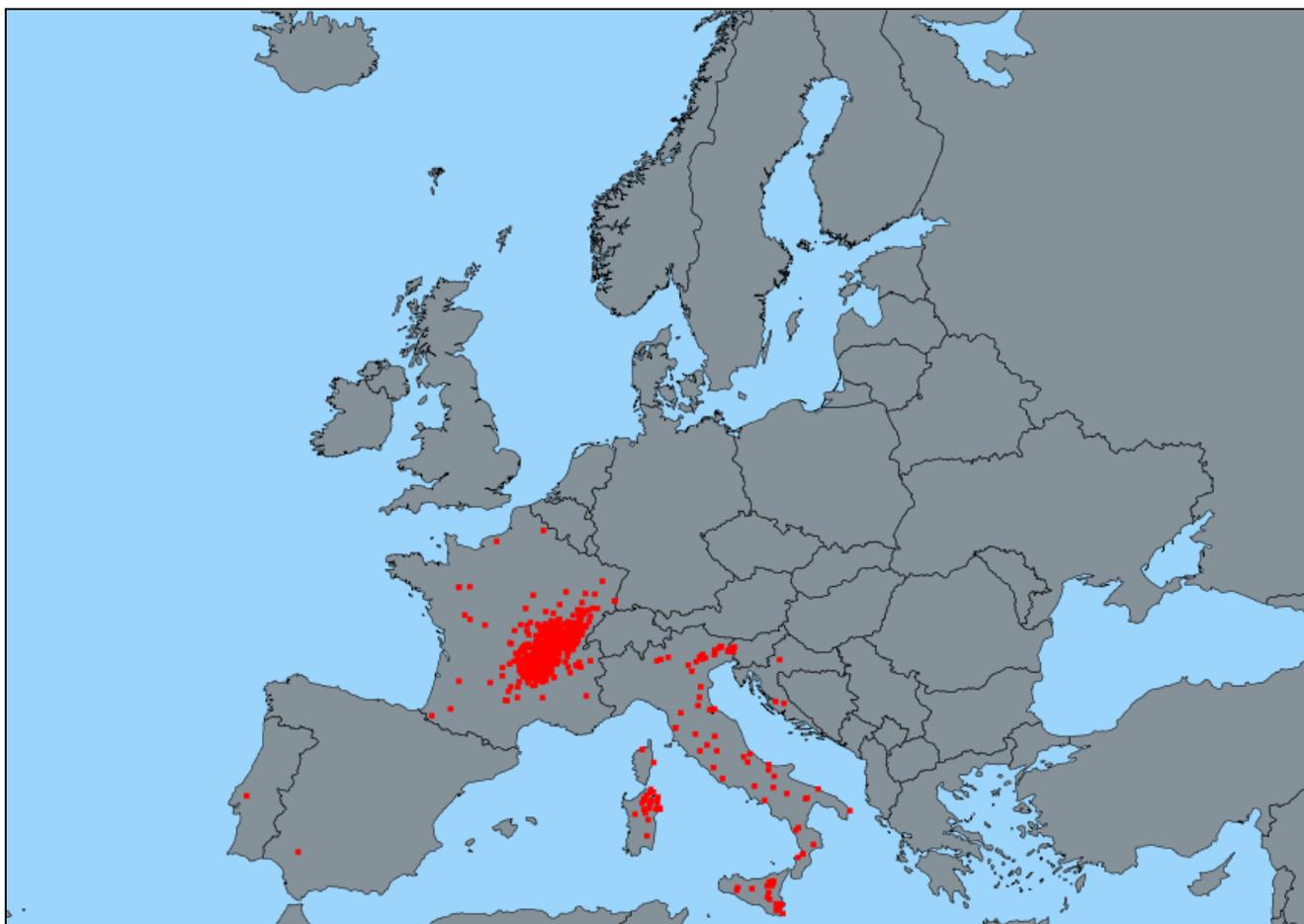
Map 1: Bluetongue restricted zones in Europe as of 31st May 2017



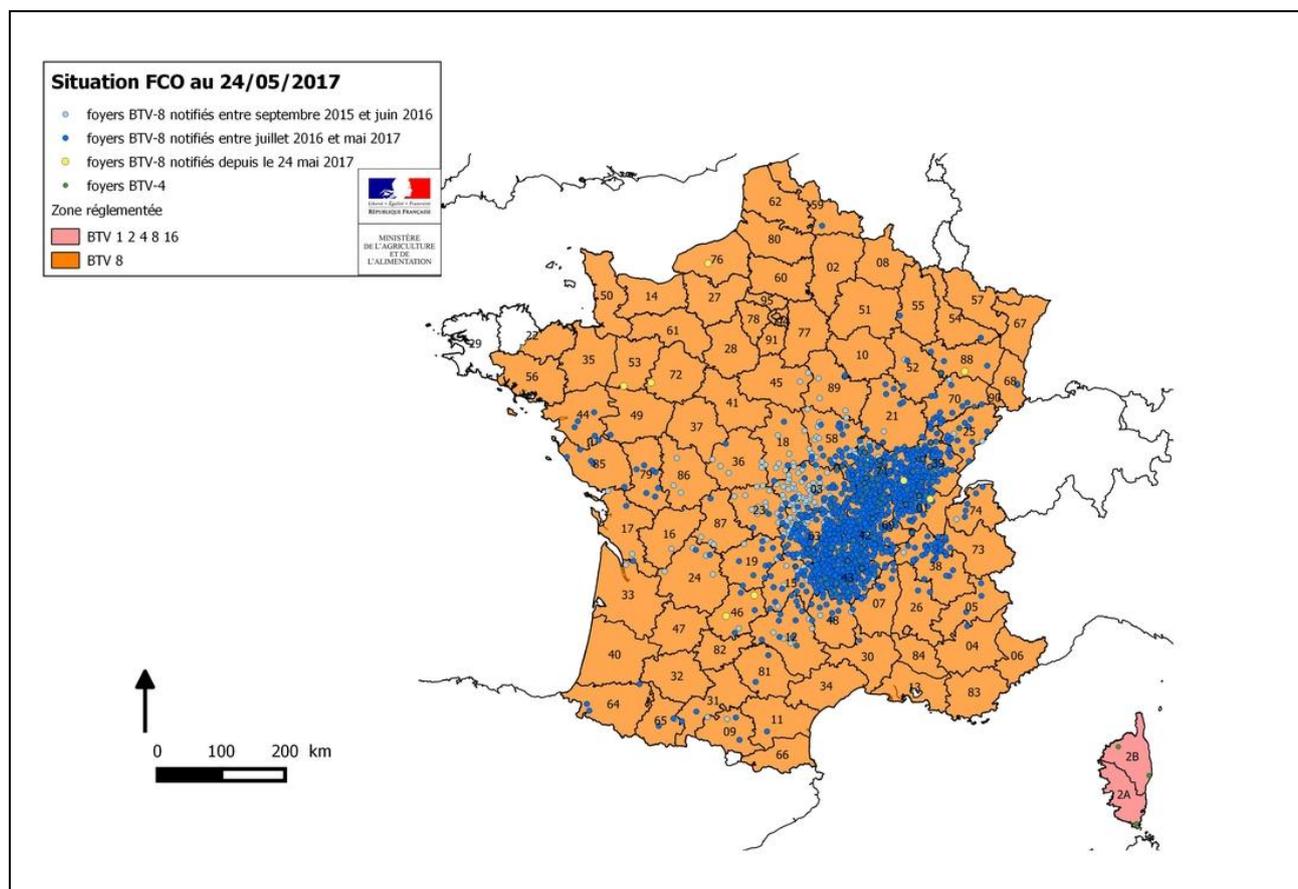
Refer to European Commission website below for most up to date information:

https://ec.europa.eu/food/animals/animal-diseases/control-measures/bluetongue_en

Map 2: Bluetongue outbreaks in the EU between 1/1/2017 and 16/06/2017 (DG SANTE ADNS)



Map 3: Bluetongue outbreaks between 2015 and 2017 and restricted areas in France as of 24th of May 2017 (Ministere De L'Agriculture)



See <http://agriculture.gouv.fr/liste-des-departements-et-des-communes-en-zone-reglementee-fco> for up to date information.